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INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

RESURGENCE OF SUBWAY CONSTRUCTION
IN THE COMMUNIST BLOC

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

Office of Research and Reports

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RESURGENCE OF SUBWAY CONSTRUCTION
IN THE COMMUNIST BLOC*

Summary

Since the fall of 1964 the Communists have been publicizing subway construction activity in Baku, Tbilisi, Tashkent, Riga, Prague, Budapest, and Warsaw. In most of these cases this publicity reflects renewed activity on suspended projects. At the same time, the USSR is continuing to expand the subway systems in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev. It is considered likely that this activity is part of a coordinated plan to provide improved transportation and adaptable civil defense shelters in important centers.

* The estimates and conclusions in this brief represent the best judgment of this Office as of 11 February 1966.

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1. Baku and Tbilisi

The USSR was secretly building subways in Tbilisi and Baku in the early 1950's. There are indications that they were designed for shelter use but that construction was suspended about 1954. The resumption of construction cannot be precisely dated, but publicity about active work on these subways appeared for the first time in the fall of 1964.

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There is evidence that the Baku subway may have been started as early as 1948. 1/ [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] part of the Baku subway was "scheduled" to serve as an air raid shelter and that construction was stopped about 1954. 3/

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No definite starting date can be assigned to work on the Tbilisi subway. [REDACTED] it was begun in the early 1950's and stopped after the death of Stalin in 1953. 4/ [REDACTED] saw surface shaft workings in 1955 and 1956, 5/ but it is not known whether actual subway construction was going on at the time.

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As recently as May 1964 [REDACTED] the USSR Council of Ministers had appropriated money to be used over a five-year period for constructing the Tbilisi subway. This system was allegedly being built for three reasons: (1) as a "gesture" to the Georgians, (2) to fill a transportation need, and (3) to serve as a civil defense shelter. It was also noted that subway shelter space was found to be more economical than the basement shelters constructed earlier in Soviet buildings. 6/

It was not until the fall of 1964 that the Soviet newspaper Pravda carried an article telling of the subway construction already under way in both Baku and Tbilisi. This was the first known public mention of these two projects. It was announced later that the first section of the Tbilisi subway would begin operation toward the end of 1965 and the Baku subway in 1967. 7/ The first section of the Tbilisi subway opened on 10 January 1966; no further details are available at present. 8/

2. Prague

25X1

[REDACTED] plans were made in 1950 for a subway in Prague, construction of which was to have started in 1953. The stations were to be built first, in order that they might be used as air raid shelters. 9/ During the 1950's, underground shelter construction was observed at several sites in Prague. 10/ Nothing further was

25X1

heard of this subway until June 1965, when [] subway construction had been started in Prague. One shaft was in operation in the downtown area, and blasting was in progress at three other locations. 11/ A subway in Prague is not urgently needed for transportation, and it is probably intended to double as a civil defense shelter. In September 1965 it was announced publicly that a subway 14 kilometers long had been approved for Prague and that project workers were to initiate geological research. 12/

3. Budapest

Postwar construction of the new Budapest subway was carried on actively and with public knowledge between 1950 and 1954. Engineers associated with this effort have stated that the Budapest subway was designed to serve as an air raid shelter. [] Soviet advisers insisted that the subway be built at a deeper level than originally planned. 13/ Engineering difficulties, high cost, and conflicting priorities were given as reasons for suspending construction in 1954.

In May 1964 an article in the Hungarian press announced that new investments had been allocated for the resumption of work on the Budapest subway. In 1965 the press reported that construction -- already under way -- would be accelerated and that new Soviet construction shields were being purchased. 14/ Construction reportedly is taking place at depths of 30 to 50 meters. 15/

In an unusual display of publicity, the Hungarians linked the Budapest subway to civil defense precautions. According to an article in the December 1965 Hungarian civil defense monthly, the new subway will insure the highest degree of shelter protection for more than 100,000 persons. Steps are said to have been taken during construction to provide defense against weapons of mass destruction. Although completion of the subway is not expected until 1973, plans have been made to adapt finished sections for earlier shelter use if the need should arise. 16/

4. Warsaw

The Warsaw subway was under construction in the period 1951-54. About ten shafts were sunk and more than a thousand meters of tunnel were built. 17/ During this period the design was changed to a deep-level (45 to 50 meters) system, reportedly at the insistence of Polish military personnel and Soviet advisers. 18/

In 1961 a Warsaw architect told a visitor that plans had been drawn up to resume subway construction in late 1964 or in 1965. 19/ Since early 1965, several articles have appeared in Polish publications indicating that preparatory work and planning are under way to resume "actual" construction of the Warsaw subway in 1970. It is suspected that some construction will begin before that time unless the old plans are discarded and entirely new plans are developed.

5. Tashkent and Riga

Tashkent is soon to have an underground railway, according to the 12 March 1964 issue of Soviet Weekly (published in London). This news appeared prior to the open publication of information on the Baku and Tbilisi subways, and Tashkent was then identified as the "fourth" Soviet city which would have a subway, the other three being Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev. In May 1965 the Soviet News Bulletin (published in Canada) announced that the construction of a "fast underground tram line" was starting in Riga, with design assistance from Leningrad engineers.

6. Moscow

The well-known Moscow subway is largely deep level, although some of the newer lines to the suburbs are built at shallow depth or even on the surface. 20/ A survey conducted [redacted] in late 1961 and early 1962 revealed that blast doors had been installed at 27 of the 51 stations visited. 21/ Most of the stations equipped with blast doors were located in the central Moscow area, where the system is deepest. In October 1962 a new line to the Novyye Cheremushki sector was opened. [redacted] the depth of this line varied from 100 to 30 feet (30 to 10 meters) as one traveled away from downtown Moscow. There were also indications that bombproof doors had been installed in all four new stations. 22/ It was announced in February 1965 that construction had begun on another new line which will run from Kaluzhskiy Station to the Botanical Gardens. This will undoubtedly be a deep-level line -- running under the Moscow River and the heart of the city. 23/

7. Leningrad

The Leningrad subway, which was started in 1947, has been expanding since the first section was opened in 1955. 24/ One new extension is scheduled to open in the spring of 1966. 25/ The Leningrad subway is deep level and is equipped for the most part with blast doors for sealing off lower station platforms. 26/ It is apparently an open secret among Leningrad residents that the subway represents a principal air raid shelter. 27/

8. Kiev

The Kiev subway reportedly was started about 1950, without any attendant publicity. 28/ There is no firm evidence that construction was slowed or halted in the mid-1950's, but an early target date for completion was shifted from 1955 to 1960.

Not until 1958 was there an official announcement that subway construction in Kiev had begun. 29/ When the first section was opened in November 1960, it proved to be deep level and to have blast doors installed at all stations. 30/ An extension was opened to two additional stations toward the end of 1963. 31/ Soon thereafter all the Kiev subway stations were very deep and equipped with protective blast doors. 32/

9. Subways and Civil Defense

The intended use of subways as air raid shelters has been indicated in Communist civil defense literature since World War II, when up to 750,000 people slept in the Moscow "Metro." Soviet civil defense manuals and brochures identify subways as one of the most secure types of air raid shelter, but the precise degree of protection afforded by these subways is unknown. An East German civil defense manual published in 1953 (which may have been based on Soviet standards) recommended that subways be made resistant to about 75 psi overpressure. Such a standard may well have been revised upward since the testing of larger nuclear weapons.

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Next 2 Page(s) In Document Exempt

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